

Written testimony in support of HB 316
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Chairman Williams, Vice Chair Luckie and Members of the Education Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 316, Act for Our Children's Future. My name is Dr. Elise Berlan. I am a pediatrician and an Adolescent Medicine specialist at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. I am here representing the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, who has more than 2500 member pediatricians in this state.

Children and adolescents in Ohio are badly in need of accurate information about sexual activity. A study published in January's *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, found that most parents discussed the following topics with their adolescents: *how to say no if someone wants to have sex and you don't want to, symptoms of STDs, how to use a condom, how well condoms work to prevent infections, how to choose a method of birth control, and what to do if a partner doesn't want to use a condom* **after** their children had already engaged in sexual intercourse. As pediatricians, we know that parents are the most important people to be delivering key information about sexuality to their children. However, this study starkly illustrates that youth are not receiving important information from their parents *at the right time*. If parents are not providing key information about sexual decision making, pregnancy prevention, and sexually transmitted infections, and if our schools are not...then how do we expect young people to know these critical facts???

Contrary to popular belief, sexually transmitted infections are a pediatric problem. Adolescent girls ages 15–19 had the largest reported number of Chlamydia and gonorrhea cases when compared to any other age group, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention press release November 16, 2009. The recently published CDC annual report on sexually transmitted infections found that more than 1.5 million cases of Chlamydia and gonorrhea were reported in 2008, making them the two most commonly reported infectious diseases in the United States. Sexually transmitted infections have a disproportionate impact on racial minorities, especially young African American women. African-Americans are twenty times more likely to have gonorrhea than whites, and had more than eight times the Chlamydia infection rate of whites. Moreover, Ohio is in the highest reporting category for both gonorrhea and Chlamydia infections.

I diagnose and treat adolescents' sexually transmitted infections almost every day. I educate young people about how they acquired their infection, and measures they can take to prevent infection. The consequences for girls and young women are particularly

troubling. Chlamydia is the leading preventable cause of infertility in the US. Untreated Chlamydia infection may lead to a serious condition called Pelvic Inflammatory Disease in as many as 40% of cases in women, and untreated Pelvic Inflammatory Disease commonly leads to infertility (20%), chronic pelvic pain (18%), and tubal pregnancy (9%). Time permitting, I could discuss health consequences of early human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, herpes, and gonorrhea with you, but since I cannot, please understand the devastating toll sexually transmitted infections take on our young people.

The patients that worry me the most are our pregnant teens. Teen pregnancy is the leading reason for girls dropping out of school. Teen mothers are less likely to finish high school and college, more likely to be poor, and remain unmarried. Their children are more likely to be born prematurely and low birth weight, less likely to have a regular doctor, more likely to enter the foster care system, and less likely to be prepared for school.

Intensified efforts to prevent sexually transmitted infections and teen pregnancy are paramount for Ohio's adolescents. Our children and youth deserve medically accurate sex education, so that they may make responsible decisions around sexual activity. Numerous studies have found that "Abstinence Only" programs are ineffective. Alternatively, many studies have demonstrated that comprehensive sex education programs are effective in delaying onset of sexual activity, reducing number of sexual partners, and increasing use of condoms and contraception. One recent study found that girls receiving comprehensive sex education were 50% less likely to become pregnant than girls receiving abstinence-only education. Health professionals including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the Society for Adolescent Medicine overwhelmingly understand the importance of young people receiving accurate information about sexuality and support the provision of comprehensive sexuality education.

As pediatricians, we do not condone early sexual activity. We believe that delaying sexual activity is ideal for adolescents. However, the most recent government survey on youth risk behaviors, called the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, found that 44.5% of Ohio high school students had engaged in sexual intercourse. And only 40% of sexually active Ohio youth used a condom at their last intercourse. Given this concerning information, it is critical that our youth receive accurate information about sexual activity, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, and contraception.

Increasing the availability of medically accurate sex education is the right move for Ohio. It is responsible and respectful of the decision making capacity of our youth. It is a critical component of efforts to prevent sexually transmitted infection and teen pregnancy in our state. It is supported by voters and parents – in a recent poll 71% of Ohio voters agreed that the best approach to sex education in Ohio's schools was to focus equally on abstinence as well as the value of condoms and contraceptive use, and a Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that 98% of parents want their children to learn about sexually

transmitted infections and 85% believe that teens need to have accurate information about birth control.

I am here as an individual physician and represent the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The pediatricians in this state – the doctors on the front lines caring for Ohio’s babies, children, and adolescents – support the passage of this bill. Passage of this bill is an important step for our children and youth, and good for the State of Ohio. The time is ripe for Ohio’s legislators to take a stand for child, adolescent, and family health.

Thank you for your time and attention.